THE SIGNED MASTERPIECE

High Tension Thrills in This Story

By Frederick Irving Anderson

THE GRACEFUL LITTLE WOMAN, CLOTHED IN A CLOUD OF BLACK, ENTERED, WEEPING. "LIFT UP THE CURTAIN, SOPHIE," SAID DEPUTY PARR WITH ELATION. "THIS IS WHERE YOU STOP FOR THE NIGHT."

NO. 142, on the south side of the street, a high-stoop, English-basement dwelling, was occupied by the widow of Amos P. Huntington. The departed, a drab, inoffensive little person, had blown himself into eternity while compounding synthetic rubber. The relict was a little Dresden china affair, as evidence of her quality, she drove a smart plum-colored brougham, drawn by a smarter pair of roached hacks, and on the box, when she was a-wheel, sat a coachman and a footman in plum-color, two stern, middle-aged males. One by one the brown-stone residences on the north side, which faced No. 142 and its few brave companions, had been converted into garages, and machine-shops for sick motors. Mrs. Huntington, in addition to these aggressions on her domestic peace, had suffered the further indignity of being dragged from her sheltered grief into open court by the insurance guarantors of her husband. Twice the little widow had won the sympathy of the jury who, in two suits, had awarded her the full amount of the claim, a quarter of a million dollars.

Directly across the street, in No. 143, was a machine shop which in grime, odor and noisy clamor differed in no respect from its neighbors. An observant person might have noted that all of its mechanics were young, stood six feet, and weighed 185 pounds. No. 143 was of the police; it was one of that series of carefully masked dead-falls which that arch man-hunter, Deputy Parr of Center street, had planted in unexpected corners throughout the city.

At 10 of an early winter morning a car of some consequence came to a jerky sputtering stop, sighed and died, at the curb in front of No. 143. The driver, a man of six feet, weighing, say 185 pounds, got down, opened the hood, and stood regarding his ailing motor with the forlorn look of a medico whose patient has gone beyond his skill. A red-headed mechanic came out, evinced sympathetic interest, put his head under the hood.

"The chief," said the driver, bending down and speaking in the mechanic's ear, "wants a report on Number 142."

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THE mechanic reconnected a high-tension wire with a spark plug, thus restoring the consequential power to its full faculties, if an emergency arose. He tore a blue ticket in two, along a line of perforation, handed one half to the chauffeur and tied the other half by a stout cord to the windshield of the automobile. The chauffeur strolled away to a back-room haunt of chauffeurs and mechanics, to while away a few hours getting acquainted. The mechanic resumed tinkering.

An hour later Mrs. Amos P. Huntington descended the steps and entered her brougham. Her footman wrapped her in moleskin and mounted the box; her mincing pair moved off. At this moment the red-headed mechanic seemed to come to the decision that a trial run was necessary. He started his hypochondriac motor, and rolled along in the wake of the plum-colored brougham.

THE WIDOW LEAVES FOR HER AFTERNOON DRIVE.

At Columbus Circle the traffic signal fell against the plum-colored brougham and the horses came to a stop, snorting motors on all sides instantly piling up. The attention of a man in a brown derby on the sidewalk was arrested by the flapping blue ticket on the windshield of the motor directly behind the brougham. He halted at the curb, and casually took off his brown derby and mopped his forehead. The red-headed mechanic answered by blowing his nose in a red bandanna, and stared abstractedly at the plum-colored brougham. The traffic sluices opened, the jam started to move. But the red-headed mechanic turned east, and in ten minutes was back to No. 143.

"Does any one follow, William?" asked the Dresden china widow in her telephone.

"No, ma'am," responded William, the footman, speaking out of the corner of his mouth, without moving his lips, into the receiver at his shoulder. "There was one," he added, encouragingly. "The mechanic opposite—but he turned off."

But that same afternoon, when she was about to turn into the avenue at the misty hour of winter twilight, she picked him up again, in her "busybody" mirror. In the mirror the cut of his jib fairly screamed his origin and purpose, to the experienced eyes of the widow. Police? No doubt of it! The flutter of his motor sounded behind.

"Careful, William—pocket him!" cautioned the lady.

"He's gone, ma'am—gone cross town," confessed the disconsolate William.

Now suddenly Sophie Lang became all alert.

"Did you see him pass the 'office,' William?"

But William had not.

Undoubtedly the "office" (she had unconsciously dropped back into the argot of her craft) had been passed. They were hunting her in relays!

Sophie preened herself. She laughed softly. Instantly she closed her pretty lips over her pretty teeth again. Out of the corners of her long eyes she examined her neighbors in the procession. Among them she knew must be one tied to her heels like noonday shadow. She tried her old bag of tricks, one by one. But with no results—except certainty. When finally that afternoon she returned to her domicile, by devious ways, her red-headed mechanic was tinkering with still another stalk motor at the curb in front of his shop; he did not even raise his eyes when her brougham drove up and drove away.

That afternoon two studious young men, bearing heavy instruments, called at No. 142 to test the electric meter. Shiny instruments were spread out on the basement stairway, with the interested servants watching and now and then obligingly handing the two scientists, by request, tools whose nickel-plated surfaces had been especially prepared for fingerprints. The next day telephone linemen asked for and received permission to pass through the house to the roof to untangle wires. An inspector for the water department, a most entertaining fellow, inspected taps for leaks. A dispute having arisen in some obscure quarter as to encroachment on the building line, a young man must enter and open every window from the inside to measure the protruding sills with a rule. Once, when he was leaning far out of a drawing-room window he asked politely over his shoulder would Mrs. Huntington please pass him his magnifying glass, which the little widow did graciously, picking it up quite unconsciously in the hand in which she held her lace handkerchief. In departing he offered her his fountain pen to sign his call-slip, but, not seeing the gesture, she used her own pen instead. By the end of the week a complete dossier of No. 142 was in the hands of Mr. Parr. In only one point had Parr's camera-eyed sleuths failed; they carried away nothing bearing the imprint of the pink finger-tips of the pathetic widow herself. Later, when the magnifying glass was used in Center street, it yielded only a hazy replica of her fine lace handkerchief.

Parr selected a cigar for himself from the pasteboard box by Oliver's elbow.

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ARMISTON, the extinct author, was merely another phase of Deputy Parr's amazing versatility. Armiston had been a weaver of tall tales, thrillers. On one occasion he had been too realistic; a cunning thief had actually copied Oliver's fiction into fact, with murder as its outcome. The ensuing sensation had driven the hectic author into retirement. Here the argus-eyed deputy found him. If fiction could be done into fact, then why not fact into fiction? So reasoned the very practical deputy of police.

Parr would dress the stage for Oliver, with characters and scenery, and ring up the curtain on a frozen plot. The results had always, to the matter-of-fact policeman, bordered on the mystic.

"As a matter of fact," said Parr, confidentially, "we don't detect crime. Crime detects itself."

"It's too bad the perpetrators aren't so obliging," put in Oliver.

"But, my dear fellow, they are—that's just the point," said Parr, expansively.

"They detect themselves, Parr?"

"Oh, absolutely. Inevitably. That is—eventually. The element of time his squealer. I have never known it to fail."

"How about the lone-wolf—the crook without a pal?"

Parr sniffed contemptuously.

"He brags," he said tartly. "Squeals on himself. It's all the same, in the long run. We have no failures. Unfinished business, yes. Sooner or later somebody blabs—blabs on me! That's what I'm here for! Let me illustrate," he went on gravely. "Did you ever hear of Sophie Lang? I suspect not. She was before your time."

Armiston shook his head.

"In the old days," Parr said, "we used to assign our bright young men to the Sophie Lang case. It was like sending a machinist's apprentice for a left-handed monkey wrench, or a quart of auger holes. There wa'n't no such animal." He laughed.

"Oh, ah! A legendary crook! I say, that's beautiful!" exclaimed Oliver.

"Legendary is right," assented the deputy. "None of us ever saw her. We knew her only by her works. When we came a cropper, we'd say 'That's Sophie.' When something slick was turned, we'd say 'That's Sophie.' We used to say that Sophie signed her serious work, like any other artist. Well, Sophie's turned up," said Parr softly.

"A squeal?"

"Certainly. What else? Haven't I been telling you?"

"But who—who squealed?"

Parr assumed a hurt look.

"Who?" he repeated. "How the devil do I know? An anonymous letter." He grunted. "They drop on my desk like the gentle dew from heaven. I am assigning myself, in my old age, to the Sophie Lang case. But this time she ain't no impossible animal. Sophie——" he paused for effect. "Sophie is Mrs. Huntington."

"The widow — the insurance widow?"

Parr nodded slowly, his eyes gleaming.

Armiston eased himself back in his chair and said disgustedly:

"I've been meeting her around for years. She's—she's eminently respectable," protested Oliver.

"Sophie would be," agreed Parr.

Armiston found Parr's complacency irritating.

"Is there anything to suggest Sophie?" he demanded.

"There's that quarter of a million dollars," chuckled Parr.

Then, with sudden inspiration Oliver queried, "Has she signed it? You say she does—or did."

"There isn't a flaw in her case," said Parr. "That's her usual signature. Limpid. She's beaten the insurance people twice, your sheltered little widow. They put the burden of proof on her. It wasn't any burden—for Sophie." He guffawed. "She hasn't got the boodle yet—they are marking time for another appeal. They'll only enters, of course. We simply wait," explained the policeman blandly. "Sooner or later every crook comes home to roost. I have a man sitting on the door-step waiting for him." Parr smiled childishly.

"You must admit it requires some intelligence on your part to pick the right door-step," said Armiston.

"Not at all!" retorted Parr. "They give us the address." He chuckled. Armiston returned to his ciphering.

"Every dog has its flea," said Parr, nodding solemnly. "Every crook has get themselves disliked, for picking on a poor helpless female. Helpless female is good!" And Parr fairly shook with mirth.

"Have you looked her up?" demanded Armiston.

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"NATURALLY. Everybody has looked her up. Clean slate. Too clean. That's Sophie. Sophie doesn't react to the ordinary methods," the deputy said. "That's why I've come to you. I thought maybe you'd like to undertake a little psychic research."

"What's her line, Parr?" asked Armiston when Parr finished recounting his findings.

"Anything. Sophie isn't squeamish," said Parr. "I've got a paperweight in my museum collection with some human hair on it—and some finger marks. I've always thought I'd like to see Sophie's finger-prints."

Oliver was abstractedly brushing his white lock with contemplative fingers. Helping himself to a fresh cigar, the deputy of police guessed he would be moving.

From that moment Mrs. Amos P. Huntington gradually faded out of the picture. The outer semblance of that quondam widow remained—her clothes, her speech, her aspect of grief; but beneath it all was Sophie, watching with beadlike eyes. For several days she devoted her talents to catching the red-headed mechanic in the act of passing her bodily to the tender mercies of his relief. But never did she detect the actual moment. This was finesse! Maybe it was the great Parr himself! She thrilled for an instant on this note. Then she decided on a stroke boldly characteristic.

When William had tucked her in among her moleskin robes he crossed to the red-headed man and informed him that his mistress would have speech with him.

"What is your name?" she asked when the red-headed man stood respectfully, cap in hand, at her carriage door.

"John Hanrahan, ma'am," he replied.

"I have had my eyes on you for some time, John, without your knowing it," said she, keenly. "You are to enter my service," she informed him, with the large air of conferring an inestimable favor; and without awaiting an answer she told John that he was to go with William to bring home a new car—she was giving up her pair because the pavements were too hard on their feet. William was instructed to take John to the tailor and have him outfitted. All this with a gracious smile, while she complimented John on the way he carried himself. The widow spoke in a little thread of a voice which broke, here and there, when she would close her eyes with a sigh. But the element of humor in the transaction was the ultimate appeal.

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A FEW days later Parr himself, held up by one of his own regal traffic cops at a busy corner, had the grim satisfaction of seeing Sophie taking his red-headed mechanic out for an airing. The new car itself was quite as perfect in its way, as had been her prancing pair—a town-car imported from France. The motor occupied a glistening bandbox away up forward. Sophie was inclosed in a gorgeous candy-box away aft. Parr's man was exposed to the world and the weather as the only visible living thing aboard, perched on a slender capstan of a seat arising out of the bare deck amidships. She was making a Roman holiday of him. Parr could not repress a chuckle—it was so like Sophie!

The Dresden china widow (or what remained of her for popular consumption) did not vary her surface routine by a jot. Before many days had passed she had isolated her red-headed mechanic's pack-brothers. One was a man with a brown derby, who always chewed a cold cigar. The other was a frayed taxi-driver with a moth-eaten beard, who had a stand just off the avenue. They were merely the hounds following blindly. It was the huntsmen behind of whom she must catch a glimpse. Her sixth sense told her that her daily life was so closely hemmed in as is an expanse of ocean by a cloudless sky. The real artist of the game was yet to reveal himself. Some move must be impending.

Her telephone she handled with the utmost delicacy—they had tapped that, of course. Whenever she used it, she would set it down softly, then instantly pick it up again, and listen for minutes on end. Nothing there—it required exquisite patience. And then, under her very elbow, some one yawned incautiously three times, and said lazily, "Oh, dear, oh, dear!" Sophie showed herself her little white teeth in the mirror, that looked down on her eaves-dropping. Her nimble mind drew a picture: it would be a big bare room, with a lazy man in a blue uniform, with receivers strapped to his ears, seated at a desk; and this police ear grafted to her wire would always be attentive.

Once Sophie was rewarded by hearing a door open, in that vague room. Again she heard the tread of feet; then the murmur of cautious voices. But it was the ticking of a clock—two of them, in fact—that pleased her most of all. How like a stupid cop, to lie in wait breathless at the mouthpiece of a microphone, with a

SOPHIE HANDLED HER TELEPHONE WITH THE UTMOST DELICACY—THEY HAD TAPPED THAT, OF COURSE. HER NIMBLE MIND DREW A PICTURE OF A BIG, BARE ROOM WITH A LAZY MAN IN A BLUE UNIFORM, RECEIVERS STRAPPED TO HIS EARS, SEATED AT A DESK.

blatant clock at his elbow! Sophie giggled.

The end of the fourth week found Parr yawning and scowling.

"The damned thing is frozen—solid!" he muttered, settling himself heavily in his favorite elbow chair by Armiston's desk.

Armiston said nothing. It wasn't frozen, to him. It was merely that the element of time had entered in. This yarn had "written itself," as he would say professionally. He had merely brushed the tips of his clairvoyant fingers, invoked the oracular keys of his faithful typewriter, and the congealed action which Parr had laid at the feet of his Medicine had straightway come to life. He had written finis, and locked his typewriter, and packed for Lakewood. Then he waited for his friend Parr to call on him.

Leaning back in his chair Armiston idly tinkered with the needle of some electrical contrivance. The grandfather clock ticked, the fire crackled, and the deputy scowled misanthropically at the fat Buddha in the corner. The needle Oliver held in his hands made a spontaneous gesture. It swung over to the middle of a calibrated arc—and stayed there, as if intent on something. Armiston, with a yawn, set the thing down, and presently picked up the telephone. He rested on one elbow, watching his friend Parr while he waited.

"Rotten service!" he mumbled, after a long wait. Parr nodded gravely.

"Parr," said Oliver abruptly, over the top of the telephone, "have you made any effort to find the husband? He's the one that squealed, of course. I suppose the poor devil got tired of hiding out."

The effect of these words, or rather of this act, on the deputy of police was electric. He reached out with one gorilla-like hand and snatched the telephone from Oliver's grasp.

"Was she on there?" he demanded.

"Certainly," said Oliver easily.

He pounded to the electric needle, trembling over the middle of the card. That telltale needle gave warning every time a receiver was lifted off its hook in No. 142. To the two watchers at that moment that tremulous needle personified the woman herself, the eavesdropper, probably at that instant cocking her pretty head with the swift movement of a startled doe.

"So you tip her off—under my nose, eh? Eh?!" snarled Parr.

Oliver continued to watch the spying needle on his desk. Abruptly, as if released by an unseen force, it flopped back to zero, nothing, on the calibrated scale. It was as significant as the snap of a dry twig. The lurker was withdrawing, on tiptoe.

Parr jammed his hat down and rushed from the room.

While the Lakewood train was picking its way across the drawbridges that span the estuaries of Newark Bay the Dresden china widow was rolling over hill and dale to Byam, a little lake among the hills where her stylish hackneys were acquiring winter coats and new hoofs, in drowsy ease. On the spur of the moment this morning she had thought of her beloved horses with a tinge of self-accusation. It was honest John Hanrahan, the red-headed mechanic, as usual, who conducted her. Some distance behind, coming into sight now and again as her car topped a rise, came on the man in the brown derby, only for this occasion he had discarded his derby for a cap, thrown away his cold cigar and acquired a mustache.

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LIFE had become a bed of thorns for the red-headed mechanic. Perched out there in the open where the widow could watch him breathe wasn't his idea of being a detective. But ahead of him this morning was a taste of paradise. Arriving at the farm, he was waiting in the kitchen when there entered a pert little French maid, a round pink person of Chippendale pattern, on high heels which gave to her walk the tilt of a Gallic poodle. She tripped daintily over to him, sat down on the edge of his bench, and indicated with a propelling shove that he was to move over a little—not too much. She folded her hands primly on her little lace apron, regarded him under her lashes. Then they both fixed their eyes on the woodbox and smiled happily.

An hour later, when his lady upstairs called for her motor, the red-headed mechanic (city bred) had changed his ideas about the attractions of the country.

As the motor rounded the drive and passed the gate cityward the maid tossed a kiss to the moon-struck sleuth.

In West Broadway the elevated trains growl all day and all night, peering in at the upper floors as they pass, where life is frankly uncurtained.

A man in seamy uniform and a brass-bound cap with a number that proclaimed him an elevated motorman examined doorway after doorway, always with a glance at the upper windows, as he picked his way along the sidewalk. Finally ascending three rickety steps he rang a grimy bell, in response to which there appeared a capacious Sicilian woman with a baby squatting on her hip. She could understand nothing he said. With a twitch of a shoulder she conferred upon him the freedom of the house.

On the first landing, he picked out a door toward the front of the house and rapped sharply. He listened. Then he rapped again and again, louder and louder. Doors above him opened and shut, but the door he attacked stared at him blankly.

He retraced his steps to the street. At the corner he sighted a policeman.

"What's that?" said the policeman, bending his head to listen. Together they crossed the street.

"There," said the motorman. "I think that man is dead. He's been sitting in that window for thirty-six hours."

He went on to explain that he had passed and repassed that face in the window on his day shifts as the controller of his train—until finally it got on his nerves, so he had come on foot to see what was up. The policeman pushed his way through the halted traffic and stamped up the stairs. He put his shoulder to the door and it fell with a weak, splintering smash. The man was dead—quite. The officer threw up a smeared window and blew on his whistle. Shortly other policemen appeared, running. A little while later a black wagon backed up to the door and carried away the man in the chair covered with a horse-blanket. Another wagon bore off the fat Sicilian woman and her baby, and several other terrified denizens of the house. They said he had been a lodger for some months, a poor man—oh, yes, very poor. It was his habit to sit in that window by the hour, by the day sometimes. Had he any friends come to see him? Who could say? The whole world might pass up and down that dingy staircase without question.

In the little building on the river front at the foot of East 26th street, where black wagons drive up at all hours of the day and night and deposit burdens covered with horse-blankets, a man stands, smoking, languidly interested. Dead souls come here; they must be inspected, suspected, like any object offered in pawn. Others come here, anxious mothers, brothers, friends, seeking. An attendant pulls out drawer after drawer for their inspection. Sometimes a shriek tells the hangers-on that a quest has ended.

A stocky man, evidently a mason, who had come directly from his work, was whispering to the attendant, trembling. The attendant listened, and nodded. He knew—yes, it was here; and he rolled out a drawer. The mason inclined his head, brushing his eyes with a lime-stained hand. His brother, he said. The attendant made a grimace over his shoulder, and the man with the cigar approached, eyeing the mason with a bleary look. He took out a note-book, and they talked in low tones, the policeman making entries as the other answered.

"You will have to be corroborated, of course," said the policeman, not unkindly.

"But why?" ejaculated the mason, horrified. The policeman said he couldn't say why—they had to be careful. The mason produced his union card and other credentials to establish his identity.

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THE next day a little funeral party departed from that side street "parlor," with what pomp the poor may give to their dead. There were four carriages, three of them empty with blinds drawn, and in the first the only mourner, the mason.

On their return, the policeman with the cigar met the foremost carriage—there were some final papers to sign for the records. When the mason stepped down he looked up and saw they were at the porticoed door of a big building. He drew back involuntarily, but the man with the cigar had a double twist on his coat sleeve.

"Come along quietly, and don't start anything," he said amiably and led the mourner up the stone steps and into a room—a big room—in which sat a man at a desk. The man at the desk was Parr, deputy commissioner of police.

"Ha, ha! At last. Well, how'd it go?" asked Parr, looking up. The mason straightened up, breathing hard.

"Sophie almost got away with it," said Parr—"knocking the old duffer off, like that, with arsenic in his dope! And turning the stiff over to us, to hand out to the first claimant that comes along to identify it—you thought you weren't ever taking a chance, didn't you, William?"

It was William, the footman—William redrawn, some lines erased, as plausible as a raised check. He swallowed hard.

Parr pointed to a glass paper weight on his desk.

"Did you ever see that before? Answer me!" he snarled, with sudden ferocity. William looked from Parr to the paper weight, and back again, but maintained silence.

"What did Amos P. Huntington call himself twelve years ago, when he left his finger prints on that paper weight, in the Park place murder?"

Parr referred to a crime that had gone down in the annals as a celebrated mystery. It was a mystery no more. The obscure man who was found dead in his chair in West Broadway had the same finger prints. William did not answer.

"What did you blow up, in your rubber plant, William?" asked Parr. "Was it a basket of cats—or dogs—or did you borrow another of your brothers from East 26th street? Sophie put the remains through the crematory so fast we didn't have a look in."

Parr laughed. So did William. By that laugh Parr knew that questions were useless. At that moment the door opened, and Armiston came in, swinging a stick.

"Take him downstairs!" growled Parr to an attendant. "Charge him with—complicity in the murder of John Doe, alias Amos P. Huntington."

Parr's eyes twinkled. When William had been led out he said to Armiston, with some relish:

"As a matter of fact, Armiston, you ought to be downstairs on that charge!"

"But how—what—I got your wire—I came right in. Is there—did she——"

"Certainly," responded Parr, nodding. "You are a wonder, Oliver!" he added. "What put it into your head to start Sophie after her husband? Don't tell me you didn't," said the deputy, as Armiston tried to break in with a word. "I heard you. You knew Sophie was listening in on the telephone the other day in your study, when you told me in a loud voice to go out and find her husband—that he had squealed on her. On the level, Armiston, I thought you were squealing on me! Then it all came over me! You've got the goods! You're all right, Oliver!"

"Well, it was the obvious thing to do, of course," agreed Oliver, now preening himself. "I knew you couldn't find him. I knew the only way was to scare her into starting after him herself—then your men could trail along behind. It made a very good ending of the story, I thought," said Oliver. "Your men trailed her, of course?"

"Well, as a matter of fact," said Parr, weakly, "she got the jump on us. You know Sophie! So we just sat back and waited."

"Waited!" ejaculated Armiston.

"Oh, Sophie did her part—she produced, him, all right," said Parr. "Dead," he added grimly. He related swiftly how the bogus Amos P. Huntington, who had been blown up by synthetic rubber and cremated, in the end came to his death and burial in so obscure a manner that the police would never have known who he was, except for one thing Sophie overlooked.

"My window-washer," said Parr. "He's a wonder, too. He managed to borrow a razor, among other personal effects of the late Amos P., that Sophie had packed away in a box. We found finger-prints on it that correspond to that," he said, pointing at the glass paper-weight. "When his dead body turned up, with the same finger-prints, the rest was simple enough." And Parr, who had complacently encompassed the murder of a murderer, by neglecting to follow Sophie too closely, leaned back in his chair. "Oh, they all come to pot, sooner or later," he said, in his philosophic mood again.

"But, Sophie——"

"Oh—she's on her way downtown now," exclaimed Parr. "Sit still. You'll see her."

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THE Dresden china widow, an hour before, had set out on her afternoon drive to air her red-headed mechanic. At Forty-second street a policeman said gruffly: "Drive up to the curb, young fellow." The red-headed mechanic had obeyed with alacrity. "Let me have your keys," commanded the traffic policeman. He took the proffered keys and calmly locked the doors of the litter. Sophie could not escape now, except by smashing glass. "Take her to headquarters!" commanded the traffic man. While Parr and Oliver sat talking, Sophie was announced. The graceful little woman clothed in a cloud of black entered weeping and sniffling in her handkerchief under her veil.

"Lift up the curtain, Sophie," said Parr, with a full breath of elation. "This is where you stop for the night."

She lifted the veil, disclosing a tear-stained face, pathetically pretty. Parr with an oath lifted himself out of his chair.

"What's the joke, Hanrahan?" he bawled, at the red-headed mechanic.

"Joke, sir? Joke?" protested Hanrahan.

"Look at her, you fool!" snarled the deputy. "Look what you've brought here—this rag doll done up in crepe!"

The lady here burst into a torrent of words. "I not understan'," she wailed, in French accents. "I am Madame 'untington maid. She move. I come to town—three-four days—to make ready. She move. This afternoon, I go out—to get leetle air. The policeman—he lock me in! Oh, he lock me in! I scream—I cry—I knock on the window. I come here. This man, he say to me 'Don't start nothings'——"

Hanrahan was holding his head. He was reviving that episode in the kitchen that made the country seem so attractive to him a few days gone by.

"Where did you get those clothes?" demanded Parr roughly.

"Madame, she give them me—she no want them more. My 'usband—he was die—'ll eat mort!"

"Take her away!" roared Parr.

"What is the charge?" asked the meek Hanrahan.

"Oh, anything—anything," snarled Parr, "so long as the newspapers don't get it. You, a detective! You on the Sophie Lang case! Oh, dear, oh, dear!"

When the door closed on the figures, it was Armiston who broke the painful silence.

"After all," he said dreamily, "it was a signed masterpiece! Eh, Parr?"

That was the end of the Sophie Lang case. There were loose ends, of course, such as William, and the maid, and the jettisoned quarter of a million dollars. The underlings proved to be very faithful tools of the lady, who took their medicine, maintaining to the end their ignorance of such a purely legendary person as Sophie Lang.

Changing Life's Schedule.

(Continued from Second Page.)

ing about the time they got stewed in New Haven.

Suppose the Mrs. had to listen to that story once a wk. for 2½ centurys, I bet they would come a evening dureing the last couple 100 yrs. when she would forget her manners and doze off with her mouth open.

Not only that but in the average family we will say that the husband and wife eats their supper away from home 15 times per annum. That leaves 350 days when the Mrs. has got to plan for supper at home. Over the present span of 45 yrs. of married life she has got to plan 16,150 suppers. Even that number gets to seem pretty big after a while but suppose the duration war lengthened to 275 yrs. or a total of 96,250 suppers. At the last few 1000 suppers it would be pretty near impossible to serve up some kind of a salad that they hadn't never eat before.

As far as a man is concerned we can figure that a man with ordinary self respects begins shaveing when they are 18 yrs. old and shaves every day from then on. If he lives 70 yrs. he shaves somewheres around 18,000 times and every time he shaves why his whiskers gets all the more tougher. If he has got to live 300 yrs. that means 102,930 times which he must shave himself and I wouldn't be surprised if during the last 100 shaves some of the larger whiskers would half to be blasted out like a stump.

Further and more take a man that is 35 yrs. old which statistics says is about the age which the majority of people is that old, well it takes all the ready money he can lay hold of to provide himself with nourishments enough to last the rest of the 70 yrs. now on the schedule. Where and the he—ll is he going to dig up money for a 265 yrs. supply of vermouth.

Or take for inst. a chorus gal and the way it is now she can get a job up to the time she is about 32 and that leaves her 38 yrs. to live on what she may of saved out of meager salary. Well if it gets to be 265 yrs. instead of 38 yrs. why I am afraid they won't be no danger of her gorgeing herself at her last few meals.

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THE same problems comes up in every walk of life and applys to men and women of all sexes. The way we are liveing now we are lucky to get by with 70 yrs. but if you add 230 yrs. to the span they will half to be changes in our scheme of life and it looks to me like now is the time to get ready for them. They will half to be changes made in the laws in regards to the legal age which people is allowed to do certain things because if we was to try and live 300 yrs. under the 50 yr. code why the last 250 yrs. would be so much alike that everybody would gap themselves to death.

So in the 1st. place I suggest that boys and gals both be kept on a milk diet till they are 50 and then wean them and put them in rompers. Gals should ought to have their comeing out party when they are 75 and before that make them wear their hair and skirts down. A boy could get his 1st. long pants when he was 70 and vote when he was 76. On his 151st birthday he would be eligible for president of the U. S.

A boy and gal under 76 and 68 resp. would half to get their parents consent to get married. In the case of another war the age for the 1st draft would be between 69 and 150. They would half to be a child labor law preventing employment of boys and gals under 55 yrs. old and kiddies under 60 would be kept off the stage.

All persons of both sexes under 69 yrs. of age must be in their home by 8 P. M. A person that worked 225 yrs. for one firm would be entitled to a pension. It would be vs. the law for a boy under 52 yrs. old to caddy. The last named law is all ready in effect at Ardsley on the Hudson.

That is some of the changes that will half to come in force to make life bearable when it lasts 300 yrs. and then of course they's other things that won't half to be changed by law but will adjust themself when the time comes.

Like for inst. a few yrs. from now when you walk along the st. and you happen to see a limousine gliddling along with Mr. Rockefeller setting in the back seat you won't say to your companion there goes old John D. You will probably exclaim what a pretty baby.

RING W. LARDNER.

Great Neck, Nov. 18.

Queen Nesting Places.

NO bird selects stranger places for a home than the house wren, the flighty, jidgety, fussy little midget of a bird that carols all day and would fight a turkey buzzard or any other thing that flies. The biological survey of the Department of Agriculture says: "Probably no bird displays greater eccentricity in the selection of a nesting place than the house wren." A hollow branch or a knothole in a post or stump is his more prosaic choice. When more esthetically inclined he affects old boots and hats hung up to scare robins from the cherries, or takes an old copper pot or tomato can lying on the roof of a back shed; or if the gardener hangs his coat on the fence when warm weather begins and forgets it for a few days he may find when he returns that an enterprising wren has pre-empted one of his pockets and has his domestic affairs under full headway. The empty skull of a horse or cow when set up on a post by the frolicsome schoolboy makes an excellent nesting place for the wren, who is never troubled by the ghost of the former occupant. Whatever place he chooses, his ambition is to occupy the whole of it. This he accomplishes by carrying sticks, straws and other rubbish until all available space is filled, only just room enough being left for the mother bird and her eggs.

Colors That Protect.

MANY curious facts about the effects of particular colors and markings of birds, insects and other creatures in concealing them from their enemies have been collected by naturalists, and the theory of "protective mimicry" has been pushed far in some cases.

An interesting observation bearing on this subject is recorded by an officer of the Carnegie Institution. About 300 chicks of various colors and patterns were allowed to run at large in a pasture. In less than two hours crows had killed twenty-four. The officer inspected the slaughtered chicks and found that they included 10 whites, 13 blacks, 1 coarsely mottled gray and buff, but not a single chick with "penciled" markings more or less like those of ordinary jungle-fowl or game. This, it is thought, was due to the relative inconspicuousness of the penciled birds and indicated that the colors arising under domestication increased the danger to the others.